

**Minutes of the Special Meeting
of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
Tuesday, August 15, 2017
9:02 a.m. –10:29 a.m.
Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA**

Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Present:

Paul Sagan, Chair, Cambridge
James Morton, Vice-Chair, Boston
Katherine Craven, Brookline
Margaret McKenna, Boston
Michael Moriarty, Holyoke
Pendred Noyce, Boston
James Peyser, Secretary of Education
Mary Ann Stewart, Lexington

Jeff Wulfson, Acting Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, Secretary to the Board

Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Absent:

Ed Doherty, Boston
Hannah Trimarchi, Chair, Student Advisory Council, Marblehead (*joined by speakerphone*)

Chair Sagan called the special meeting to order at 9:02 a.m. and thanked members for coming to the special August meeting. Chair Sagan said the main topic for discussion is the search process for a permanent replacement for the commissioner. Chair Sagan acknowledged the recent passing of Kathy Kelley, former President of the American Federation of Teachers-Massachusetts. He acknowledged Tim Nicolette who was in attendance and his new role as Executive Director of the Massachusetts Charter Public School Association. Chair Sagan welcomed Hannah Trimarchi, the newly elected student member of the Board, who was unable to attend the meeting but was joining by speakerphone. Chair Sagan added that Hannah's presence on the phone would not constitute "remote participation" under the Board's by-laws. He thanked her for joining the meeting.

Chair Sagan said he was pleased to attend the Department's senior staff meeting recently to briefly discuss the upcoming commissioner search. Acting Commissioner Wulfson thanked Chair Sagan for attending the meeting and acknowledged the support he has been receiving from staff. The Acting Commissioner also expressed his condolences to the family of Kathy Kelley.

Secretary Peyser expressed his condolences to the family of Kathy Kelley. Secretary Peyser said she was a warm human being who cared deeply for children, and she will be deeply missed.

Approval of Minutes

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approves the minutes of the June 27, 2017 Regular Meeting.

The vote was unanimous.

Update on Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) State Plan

Acting Commissioner Wulfson said the Department submitted the proposed state plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to the U.S. Department of Education (USED) in early April 2017. The plan underwent both a peer review, conducted by external content area experts, and a review by USED staff. USED provided feedback on the plan in July. Acting Commissioner Wulfson invited Associate Commissioners Rob Curtin and Matt Pakos to update the Board on the plan and the feedback received from USED. Ms. McKenna asked by what date we have to re-submit the plan. Acting Commissioner Wulfson said we received an extension and expect to re-submit the plan soon. Mr. Pakos reviewed the process to date, summarizing in particular the stakeholder engagement.

Ms. Craven arrived at 9:15 a.m.

Mr. Curtin noted that most of the comments from USED related to the accountability portion of the plan and that significant progress had been made resolving these issues. The main issue still under discussion is the use of the average scaled score as a measure of academic achievement. Mr. Curtin explained that the Department would like to use the average scaled score of a district's MCAS results to determine proficiency because it takes into account the performance of all students, while USED favors using a measure related to the percentage of students who score proficient. Acting Commissioner Wulfson noted that other states have taken a position similar to the position Massachusetts is taking. Chair Sagan inquired what arguments are on the other side. Acting Commissioner Wulfson said USED may be relying on the language of the statute to support its view, rather than taking a policy position.

Secretary Peyser added that the Department's position makes sense because we are sending a clear signal that we want all students to achieve proficiency. Ms. McKenna said using the average scaled score could mask the number of students who have not reached proficiency. Mr. Curtin responded that using the percentage of students who score proficient as a measure could have the same impact. Chair Sagan wondered whether having both measures would be the appropriate result. Mr. Curtin agreed, saying we want to use the average scaled score and also set rigorous targets, which we believe is a reasonable combination of those two factors. Mr. Curtin added that in order for the Department's plan to be reviewed, we had to submit proposed weights for each of the indicators in the proposed accountability system. The weights submitted are in accordance with our present system and are not final. He said the Department looks forward to discussing with the Board in the fall what the new weights might be.

Update on Southbridge Public Schools

Chair Sagan welcomed Senior Associate Commissioner Russell Johnston to provide an update on the Southbridge Public Schools and thanked him for his work as interim receiver. Mr. Johnston began by highlighting a few items from the school year 2016-17 including the creation of new curriculum units and improved supports for English learners. Mr. Johnston said he is pleased with the progress made in those areas. Mr. Johnston added that progress has also been made over the summer on the ELA curriculum units, district-wide implementation of school improvement plans, and budget improvements. Mr. Johnston said the district had a balanced budget for FY17 and is able to meet district priorities for this school year. Mr. Johnston provided a breakdown of revenue sources and an explanation of expenditures.

Ms. Noyce arrived at 9:40 a.m.

Mr. Johnston explained that when he became interim receiver, the Department became aware that the district's purchasing process was decentralized, and that while funds were used to meet the educational needs of students, there was not sufficient central office oversight. The Department took immediate steps to address the situation and return to a system of financial oversight by the central office. Mr. Johnston added that the district is finalizing a contract for a lead partner to manage its business office and human resources responsibilities.

In regard to the search for a new receiver, Mr. Johnston explained that the district will seek input from the community on the qualities and characteristics they would like the next receiver to have. Mr. Johnston stressed the importance of finding a quality candidate over speed. He added that Chiefs for Change will provide funding for the district to hire a project manager to oversee the recruitment process for a new receiver. Mr. Johnston said he has built a team in Southbridge, and he will be able to serve as interim receiver as long as needed.

Mr. Johnston said the schools are on track in implementing the Turnaround Plan. He reported that a tentative agreement has been reached with the Southbridge Education Association (SEA), pending a ratification vote. Mr. Johnston added that the district is in the midst of new teacher orientation week which will include a tour of Southbridge so teachers better understand the strengths of the community. He said the first day of school is August 28th.

Chair Sagan commented that while this situation is not where we wanted to be, the Board appreciates the fact that Mr. Johnston has stepped in as interim receiver. Ms. Stewart asked about the number of new teachers in the district. Mr. Johnston said there will be about 70 new teachers, and about 175 teachers total. Mr. Morton asked how the community is responding. Mr. Johnston said while the community has some concerns, they would like initiatives to continue. Chair Sagan thanked Mr. Johnston for his presentation.

Budget Update

Acting Commissioner Wulfson invited Bill Bell, Senior Associate Commissioner, to provide a brief update on the FY18 budget. Mr. Bell explained that there was an increase to Chapter 70 aid, Special Education Circuit Breaker, and Regional School Transportation over FY17. He noted

that Student Assessment funds are insufficient to meet our planned program spending for the upcoming school year. Chair Sagan said the goal is to find a way to move forward without weakening the assessment plan. Mr. Bell added that the Department continues to work with constraints on personnel and administrative costs. Acting Commissioner Wulfson noted that the Department will not look to add new positions and not all open positions will be filled.

Ms. McKenna asked if it would be possible at a future meeting to have a status update on education bills pending before the Legislature. Chair Sagan agreed that it would be a good idea for the Board to receive an update.

Commissioner Search Process

Chair Sagan invited Deputy General Counsel Deb Steenland to the table for the discussion on the commissioner search process. Chair Sagan said he has spoken to Commissioner Chester's wife Angela Sangeorge and conveyed the Board's condolences. Chair Sagan noted that the family has set August 28 for the memorial service for Commissioner Chester. Chair Sagan said choosing the next commissioner will be the Board's most important job. He added that Massachusetts has been incredibly fortunate to have had a commissioner who held the position for such a substantial period of education reform implementation and who was a driver of that reform. Chair Sagan said the search process will go forward consistent with the Open Meeting Law and the Board will interview finalists in public.

Chair Sagan said Acting Commissioner Wulfson has informed the Board that he will not apply for the position. Chair Sagan added that the Board is grateful to Mr. Wulfson for taking on the interim commissioner responsibilities. Chair Sagan said across the country there has been an outpouring of respect for Commissioner Chester and condolences on his untimely passing.

Chair Sagan explained it will be necessary to procure the services of a third party search firm to help with much of the administrative work. He said he will work with Mr. Bell on an RFP. Chair Sagan said he will likely set up a subcommittee to review initial applicants confidentially and narrow the list to three to five finalists to interview publicly. Chair Sagan noted that by statute, the chosen candidate must have eight of eleven votes of the Board in order to be recommended to the Secretary for appointment. Chair Sagan said it will take some time but we hope to have a decision by the end of the year, which he said is an aggressive but reasonable timeframe.

Ms. McKenna stressed the importance of securing a good search firm that looks beyond traditional candidates and values diversity. Chair Sagan agreed, and noted that a search firm was used when Commissioner Chester was hired. Mr. Morton advocated for the importance of quality versus speed in the search. Ms. Trimarchi asked how the Board would solicit outside input. Chair Sagan explained that during the last search ten years ago, there was a 25-person subcommittee. He said he expects we will include input from the public and likely convene a smaller advisory board. Chair Sagan concluded by stating he is hopeful that a search firm will be engaged in September.

Salary for Acting Commissioner

Chair Sagan recommended to the Board that Acting Commissioner Wulfson be provided a ten percent increase to his current salary in recognition of his additional duties as Acting Commissioner.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, pursuant to Mass. General Laws chapter 15, section 1F, sets the salary for Jeff Wulfson as Acting Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education at an annual rate of \$184,827.50, effective June 27, 2017 and continuing until he concludes his service as Acting Commissioner.

The vote was unanimous.

Chair Sagan concluded the meeting and wished the members an enjoyable remainder of the summer. He added that he will be participating remotely in the September meeting.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at 10:29 a.m., subject to the call of the Chair.

The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeff Wulfson

Acting Commissioner of Elementary and
Secondary Education
and Secretary to the Board